



# STATE OF MONTANA

## Office of the State Public Defender

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*August 2014*

*Report to the Public Defender Commission*

*Catherine Huston, Liaison for Investigators and Support Staff*

### **SUPPORT STAFF:**

#### **Support Staff Training:**

The Support Staff training was held in Helena April 30<sup>th</sup>-May 1<sup>st</sup>. Comments during and after the event were generally positive. An online survey was conducted and the overall results were quite favorable. The overall rating for the training was 47% good and 33% excellent. Suggestions were submitted and the only generalized complaint was the length of the breakout sessions. Staff seemed to want more of a variety of sessions, with less time allotted. A few of the comments included ideas on how to make some breakouts strictly devoted to newer employees and possibly some advanced training for our office managers and more seasoned employees. The following awards were given at the annual conference:

Administrative Support of the Year	Anna Garza	Region 1 (Kalispell)
Teamwork	Tara Winterrowd	Region 1 (Kalispell)
Direct Legal Support	Mary Brown	Region 5 (Anaconda)
Outstanding Achievement	Katie Beckman	Region 8 (Bozeman)

#### **Wages/Salary Survey:**

We cannot emphasize enough that Support Staff wages have been, and continue to be a major concern. The wage gap and discrepancies in pay within our organization are only widening. The Support Staff's current salaries are based on a 2006 market. We're sitting at 2014 this next session, and we haven't even been able to move our staff to the 2012 market salary. Timm Twardoski offered staff some suggestions and ideas on how to get their concerns out to local representatives during the Support Staff training in April. Mr. Twardoski indicated that they have to be active participants in the legislative fight for better wages.

Members of the Support Staff are prepared to send people to the next Legislative session to give the details of the wage discrepancies in our organization vs. other State agencies. Based on the conversations at the LMC meeting, both investigators and attorneys are very supportive of focusing on our Support Staff.

## **INVESTIGATORS:**

### **Investigator Training:**

The investigator training is scheduled for August 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in Livingston. The final agenda was not yet available at the time of this report, however some of the topics will include cell phone analysis, forensics and forensic interviewing techniques. One session will be devoted to investigators having the chance to review difficult cases from other regions to offer new avenues to try when investigating, issue spotting, etc. A new view and perspective on difficult cases will be highly beneficial.

### **Investigator Firearms Bill:**

The investigators have every intention of introducing another bill this session to authorize concealed carry in state cars and offices. Cathy Huston, Region 6 spoke at great length to the Probation and Parole supervisor in the Havre area after learning of new policy and procedure changes within their organization. These changes place even more emphasis on employee safety.

Two new changes for Probation and Parole Offices statewide includes doubling up officers when doing home checks and when making arrests and doing transports. So, in addition to them having state issued firearms, OC spray, ammunition, gear and training, they no longer do the most dangerous or difficult portion of their job alone. The Probation and Parole supervisor was stunned to learn we did not have firearms or even OC spray. He stated that he felt Probation and Parole Officers and OPD Investigators are on a very level playing field. He stated that his officers do not have the ability to arrest anyone other than their own probationers, are required to be in the field, travel, and be in locations with no cell service. I think if articulated and presented well, these Probation and Parole changes could greatly benefit our argument.